

Insight and Outlook . . . By Joseph Kraft

The CIA Fuss

EVERYBODY KNOWS that unstable people react to the complexities of modern life by aligning themselves with the extremes of right and left.

But how about us undogmatic problem-solvers of the center? How do we cope with difficulties superhuman in scale, remote in cause, and with many facets only obscurely connected?

The answer, I think, is that we trivialize. We focus on matters symbolically related to what really bothers us, but much simpler to understand. And that, I believe, is what the current fuss over the Central Intelligence agency is all about.

Intrinsically the Agency's practice of giving secret support to groups of students and other private persons is a trivial affair. It did not debase free institutions nor baffle unfree ones. Fifteen years of it have had less effect for better or worse than one day of the Vietnam war or the civil rights struggle.

But symbolically the Agency's dark practices are related to a problem that bothers us all. It is the problem of how we run the country.

Like it or not, the country is dominated by large units—big companies, big unions, big cities, big universities, big Government and mass media. These large institutions are staffed by faceless bureaucracies. They are increasingly led by faceless managers.

TRADITIONALLY rela-



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tions between those huge institutions have been those of rivals. There have been visible boundaries and frequent fights. And tension between the giants, their "countervailing power" as Professor J. Kenneth Galbraith once called it, has been our surety for competition, initiative and change—for a free society.

But recently conflict has more and more given way to working partnerships arranged in invisible inside bargains among like-minded managers. There has been a harmony, a universal interpenetration among Government, business, labor, education and communications. We are all part of a seamless web—a system.

I think, and I think most people think, the system works. But it is clear that there have been some shabby bargains in the past, some harmonies achieved at heavy cost to some groups—notably Negroes and poor people.

What is worse, we are really never certain as to how well or ill the system is working. For institutions are too interconnected, causes and effects too much mixed up, heroes too much like villains, for anybody to define trouble spots with confidence, or affix responsibility with clarity.

All thoughtful people, accordingly, are unremittingly anxious, doubtful about the social bargains we have struck, uneasy about the partnerships between traditional opposites. And this

malaise is felt with special force by younger people, who are rightly suspicious of their elders anyway.

ALL OF THESE doubts and misgivings have found the solace of an emotional jag in the case of an intelligence agency known to practice black arts working secretly with institutions supposedly pure in heart. The young have had a chance to blow the whistle on their elders—and to do it not through an established publication but through one that expresses their worst doubts—Ramparts Magazine.

Day-to-day revelations have given the rest of the communications world a chance to show its fearless independence. And everybody else, inside the Government and out, has been able to denounce the arrangements of the past which, at the very least, had

long been outdated by changing events.

Precisely because so much emotion is at stake, it is important to settle the present trouble sensibly and with dispatch. This means spinning off to other agencies all of the CIA's commitments in the fields of education and culture. It means setting up an effective review procedure—not one dependent on people with a hundred other things to do—for assessing all agency operations and periodically killing off those which have outlived their use.

But no one should suppose that doing these things is going to make much of a difference. For the truth is that the whole CIA fuss is only a trivial expression of the far deeper pain that comes from living in a world without clean boundaries and sharp distinctions.

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